

(thrive)



inside

Singing with art and soul

Singer-songwriter Bertie Blackman talks about childhood memories, the stereo in her head and staying healthy on the road.

As the daughter of iconic Australian painter Charles Blackman, Bertie has always been surrounded by creativity, and it didn't take her long to discover music as her own particular artistic outlet.

"When I was really little I did want to be a visual artist," she muses. "But I'd always written songs in my head. It's kind of like I've got a stereo in my brain and I can never turn it down – it's always been there."

At around the age of 11 she picked up the drums and started playing in garage bands, but she soon found that percussion wouldn't allow her to express all of the melodies she was hearing in her head. "I just wanted to do everything – play guitar, sing. It's all been quite a natural and organic process."

This October, Bertie released her fourth album of edgy, evocative pop, *Pope Innocent X* – the highly anticipated follow-up to her ARIA-award winning 2009 release *Secrets and Lies*.

"It's a bit of a concept album in a way," Bertie says of her richly visual, story-based new release. "It's about a few years of my childhood that I don't have a memory of, so I've kind of made up stories to insert into where those gaps are for me. So it's a bit of a fantastical journey."

Some tracks are more whimsical and upbeat, while others – such as *Shadow Chaser*, which recalls her childhood memories of her father – are deeply personal. "The first

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line of the song, 'I always thought you were a friend or at least you would pretend' is sort of me reflecting on that relationship, so it's a very emotional song to sing," she says.

The album's title was inspired by a dark, unsettling 1953 painting by Francis Bacon called *Study After Velazquez's Portrait of Pope Innocent X*, which Bertie found herself strangely captivated by.

"I wanted the title to have a bit of a sense of curiosity about it," she says. "Francis Bacon is one of my favourite artists. He and my dad actually knew each other – they lived in the



same building in London in the '60s, so there's a bit of a family tie there as well."

Visual art plays another important role in this album, with each song accompanied by an ink drawing by Bertie herself. "It's something I've always sort of shied from a little bit, with the weight of the family name," she says. "But it came about very naturally, and it was a really lovely journey illustrating each song, trying to tell the tale in a single image."

"It's like kids' stories for adults, or maybe adult stories for kids. I love the idea of that."

This summer, Bertie is taking *Pope Innocent X* to the stage, wrapping up a tour with Gotye with performances at Falls Festival and Southbound. "I'm really excited," she says. "I love playing at festivals. Everyone has a good time, and it's great to be able to be part of that experience for people."

(HEALTH Q AND A WITH BERTIE)

HOW DO YOU STAY HEALTHY WHEN YOU'RE ON TOUR?

I try to drink heaps of water and fresh juice and try to get salad wherever I can. And when you're on the road, breakfast is definitely the most important meal of the day. I go for walks, but the gigs themselves are pretty physical experiences anyway, so it's good exercise being on the road. It's tiring, but I always feel really fit when I get back.

HOW DO YOU DEAL WITH STRESS?

You kind of just have to ride through it. I'm naturally quite anxious, but things like exercise and keeping busy help me to stay focused and present. I'm lucky that I've got really lovely guys in my band who are really gentle and nice, and they're not big drinkers or anything, so on the road it's not like a big trash fest – we go out for good food, enjoy the finer things.